

First record of Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* for Kenya and East Africa

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Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* is a widespread Asian raptor with both resident and migratory populations across its extensive range. The migratory subspecies *P. p. orientalis* breeds from southern Siberia east to Japan and North Korea, and spends the non-breeding season in southern and South-East Asia, while typically sedentary populations of the other five subspecies (*P. p. ruficollis*, *P. p. torquatus*, *P. p. ptilorhynchus*, *P. p. palawanensis* and *P. p. philippensis*) breed from India east to the Greater Sundas and the Philippines—a range that roughly mirrors the non-breeding range of *P. p. orientalis*. The species has attracted much interest among Western Palearctic birdwatchers in recent decades, following its discovery on migration in Turkey in autumn 1979 (Laine 1996), subsequently at the Chokpak Pass, Kazakhstan, since 1993 (Forsman 1994) and, most recently, even Cyprus (Harrison 2014) and southern Italy (Scuderi & Corso 2011). It is now considered an uncommon but regular passage migrant and winter visitor to the Middle East, where perhaps at least 100 individuals overwinter each year, mainly in Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, but with records from most states (Babbington & Campbell 2016, Forsman 2016). There has been speculation as to the numbers of Crested Honey Buzzards that might straggle to Africa within flocks of migrant European Honey Buzzards *P. apivorus*, especially given the volume of records in Israel (Alon *et al.* 2004, Koss *et al.* 2008). However, there have been just three records from the continent including just one in sub-Saharan Africa: Egypt, May 1996 (Baha el Din & Baha el Din 1997), Gabon, August 2004 (Clark & Christy 2006) and Sudan, June 2011 (T. Jenner; www.africanbirdclub.org/afbid/search/browse/species/234).

On 26 September 2014, RMM photographed an adult female Crested Honey Buzzard in Meru National Park, Kenya (00°12'32"N, 38°03'30"E). The bird was observed flying over farmland adjacent to *Acacia-Commiphora* scrub typical of the region. It was always at least c.250 m from RMM, who managed to take eight photographs (e.g. Figs. 1–2) during the c.1 minute the bird was visible before it was lost from view. This record is the first for Kenya and East Africa, and the second for sub-Saharan Africa.



Figures 1–2. Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*, Meru National Park, Kenya, 26 September 2014 (R. M. Marsh)

The bird was identified during a chance review of the photographs by ASK, who realised that all of the visible features were clearly consistent with *P. ptilorhynchus*. While the bird's structure is similar to *P. apivorus*, it is noticeably bulkier with a large broad tail and bulging trailing edge to the wing. The wings also show six emarginated primaries which, combined with structure, is one of the most notable features of *P. ptilorhynchus* (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001, Svensson *et al.* 2009, Forsman 2016). The underparts and underwing-coverts are mostly tawny rufous-brown with cream-coloured barring. The carpal region is slightly darker but lacks the diagnostic dark or blackish patch of *P. apivorus*. The inner secondaries show two well-defined bars and the outer secondaries and inner primaries possess three bars. The emarginated primaries are also barred beyond the emarginations, unlike *P. apivorus*, which typically shows solid black feather tips. The undertail pattern consists of one heavy band close to the tip, one clear band beyond the undertail-coverts and one less obvious band at the base. The head is mostly pale creamy grey with a dark streak through the eye. A conspicuous dark collar and dark mesial streak are visible. The cere appears greyish and the irides yellow. Other than the upperwing, the upperparts are not visible on any of the images.

While *P. apivorus* is the sole *Pernis* expected on the African continent, this observation confirms that Crested Honey Buzzard does, at least occasionally, migrate to or through East Africa and that European Honey Buzzards should be carefully scrutinised for the species.

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